

In Memoriam: Lew Valentine Adams

David Baker



I first met Lew Adams about five years ago, when I was invited to visit Roy Creek Canyon by my colleague and long-time friend Christy Muse to learn about this unique natural treasure and to meet the owner and a group of conservation leaders working together with Lew and his family to conserve this extraordinary place. I was stunned by what was the most unique and beautiful canyon I had ever seen in the Texas Hill Country and inspired by Lew's passion and his family's long history of caring for this untouched biodiverse tributary to the Pedernales River. I met Jerry Webberman and Tom "Smitty" Smith that day and we all committed to begin working with Lew and his family to protect this special place. What evolved was one of the great friendships of my life.

Lew was the son of Louis Taft "Red" Adams, a man who grew up in the piney woods in East Texas, a hunter, fisherman, and nationally celebrated wildlife photographer, and Marjorie Valentine Adams, one of the remarkable women of Texas letters. Marjorie's syndicated "Bird World" column reached readers across the country. She and Red's pioneering documentary, *What Good Is a Warbler?* was filmed in the canyon after nearly a decade of research and following migration routes deep into Mexico, and helped secure the Golden-Cheeked Warbler's endangered status and changed conservation policy in Texas. The little cabin in the canyon where she worked became a gathering place for the thinkers and truth tellers of their era: Roy Bedichek, Ann

Richards, Molly Ivins, Cactus Pryor, Billie Porterfield and many others - people who understood that wild nature and the written word belonged together. Lew grew up with this knowing and walked with a deep connection to nature his whole life. The canyon was a touchstone for Austin's legendary writers and voices that shaped the conservation movement, advocating for the region's landscapes and the precious spring fed waters that birth our creeks and rivers.

He carried his parents' covenant forward diligently without compromise. For more than eight decades, the Adams family kept Roy Creek Canyon precisely as it was when Red and Marjorie first descended through the limestone into that hidden, spring-fed world. Lew knew every path in his body. He had traversed those cracks in the bedrock so many times, he knew the canyon and the canyon was written into him.

He did all of it alongside his beloved wife Louise, his devoted partner and, as he told me with quiet pride, "she is the wind beneath my wings." Together they built a life dedicated to film, to conservation, and to that special place in the canyon. Louise passed in September 2024, and Lew carried the loss with grace while continuing to press forward on the conservation easement work, determined to see it completed. That faithfulness, in the face of grief, speaks volumes about Lew and his heart.

In December 2025, just three months before he passed, Lew invited me to sit down with him and his daughter Melynda Smith to record his wishes for the canyon — so his wishes could be made part of a conservation easement to protect the land in perpetuity. He got a little way into the story and his voice broke and as the emotion of the moment caught him by surprise, he paused and said "so it is." Then, gathering himself, he spoke for another hour, because there was too much to say and he was not a man who left important things unsaid. That afternoon is among the most precious I have known in thirty years of this work.

Lew is survived by his daughter, Melynda Smith; his son-in-law, Joe Smith; and his grandchildren, Morgan Barnett, Jordan Hood, and Cameron Smith and their families. His sister, Zilla Katherine Adams, and niece Kelly Zabcik and her husband Bob, whose devotion to the family and the canyon has been extraordinary, niece Alethea Witherspoon, and nephew Adam Witherspoon and his wife Jessica and their families; and his longtime neighbor, Jody Askins, who shares the stewardship of Roy Creek Canyon with the Adams family.

I will remember Lew for his genuine heart, warmth, wit, unwavering dedication to conservation and preserving the canyon, and sincere love for his family, friends and colleagues.

To carry out Lew's wishes and complete the conservation easement for Roy Creek Canyon is a most urgent and most personal priority. Hays County has pledged to help protect this sacred place and additional support is needed to finalize the easement. We will be steadfast in conserving this one of a kind natural treasure - in honor of Red and Marjorie, who made the first covenant to steward the land, and for the enduring legacy of Lew and Louise, and their family, who held the land with unwavering faith, deep passion, and abiding love for this special place meant to endure for generations to come.

The canyon holds. The work continues.

With love and in his memory,

David Baker

Executive Director, The Watershed Association

LEW VALENTINE ADAMS

May 7, 1945 – March 9, 2026

In Loving Memory of Lew Valentine Adams.

With heavy hearts, we announce the passing of Lew Valentine Adams.

Lew spent the majority of his life behind the scenes — behind the camera, planning productions or serving as a producer and director, to bring other people's stories to life. Today, however, he is the story.

Lew V. Adams was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, on May 7, 1945, to Louis Taft and Marjorie Valentine Adams. His father, Louis "Red" Adams, served in the Navy as a Gunnery Sergeant and the family lived on the Naval Air Base. Lew's mother, Marjorie ("Granny GG"), shared with me that his love for airplanes began at a very young age; he would watch the planes take off and land from his playpen.

Lew spent most of his childhood in Austin, Texas. He graduated from Austin High School in 1963 and later attended the University of Texas. He moved his family to Los Angeles in 1965, after learning of opportunities in the film industry from his Uncle Ron, who was also one of his best friends.

As the youngest cameraman at NBC, his strong work ethic allowed him to advance quickly. In those days, professional growth relied heavily on word of mouth. He worked with countless talented people on more shows than can be listed, but his favorite highlights included The Dean Martin Show, The Andy Williams Show, The Bob Hope Show, Operation Entertainment, and their various specials and holiday programs.

Lew had three main loves: Louise, airplanes, and making movies. He was able to combine all of these on several of his latest productions, since he and Louise started VNE Productions. They worked together so well and were true partners in every way. She was the wind beneath his wings. They worked together on Stealth Helicopter and many other government productions for The Discovery Channel. Their latest labor of love was The Heroes of Old Hickory, which took over 20 years of research, prep, and filming. They spent many months in France, filming interviews with WW2 veterans and war re-enactments, and met so many amazing people who became their close friends. Lew and Louise received an award from the town of Mortaine, France, with a plaque placed in a memorial on the hill, and special recognition from the National Guard for

their work on the Heroes of Old Hickory documentary and for bringing the history of the town and the story of the American soldiers to life.

Beyond his professional achievements, Lew was a man of many passions. He excelled at building and flying model and private airplanes and drones, working on cars, and fixing almost anything. He dedicated his life to making memorable and meaningful films and fighting for water and wildlife conservation.

Lew was one of the leaders in the conservation efforts to protect Roy Creek Canyon and the Pedernales River from overdevelopment and overpumping. Lew's dedication to preserving the canyon and its wildlife was an inspiration to many people in the Hill Country.

He was a wonderful friend, son, brother, uncle, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, and above all, an incredible husband to Louise.

Lew was predeceased by his wife, Frances Louise Adams, in September 2024, and his parents, Louis (Red) Taft Adams and Marjorie Valentine Adams. He is survived by his daughter, Melynda Smith; his son-in-law, Joe Smith; his grandchildren, Morgan Barnett, Jordan Hood, and Cameron Smith, and their families; his sister, Zilla Katherine Adams; his nieces Kelly Zabcik and Alethea Witherspoon; and his nephew Adam Witherspoon and their families.

Lew will be remembered for his strength, warmth, wit, creativity, and his unwavering love for colleagues, family, and friends, whose lives he touched. He will be deeply missed and fondly remembered.

Celebration of Life

A Celebration of Life will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, June 13th, at the Lakeway Activity Center, 105 Cross Creek, Lakeway, Texas — Lew and Louise's home city for more than 30 years.

Memorial Donations

Donations in Lew's memory can be made to the following organizations:

The Watershed Association: Donate to the [Watershed Association](#)

Save Our Springs: [Donate to Save Our Springs](#)

The Nature Conservancy: Donate to [The Nature Conservancy](#)

[Watch a Short Film, Narrated by Lew Adams: Roy Creek Springs Going Dry](#)

[Click here to learn more about Roy Creek Canyon and Lew's inspiring connection to this sacred place.](#)